

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An absorbent garment for personal wear about the wearer's waist, said absorbent garment comprising:

a garment shell configured for encircling the wearer's waist and having a front waist region, a front waist end at 5 said front waist region, a back waist region and a back waist end at said back waist region; and

an absorbent assembly disposed within the garment shell and constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an inner surface 10 adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, an outer surface, a front waist region in opposed relationship with the front waist region of the garment shell, a back waist region in opposed relationship with the back waist region of the garment shell, a crotch region 15 extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and the back waist region of the absorbent assembly, a front waist end and a back waist end, the absorbent assembly being releasably attached generally at its front waist end to the garment shell generally at the front waist end of the garment shell, said absorbent assembly also being releasably attached generally at its back waist end to the garment shell generally at the back waist end of the garment shell.

2. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has at least one outer leg opening and a pair of inner leg openings separate from and disposed within the garment shell, the absorbent assembly at least in 5 part defining said inner leg openings of the absorbent garment, said garment shell defining said at least one outer leg opening of the absorbent garment.

3. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 2 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to provide an elastic fit of the absorbent assembly against the wearer's legs at the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment, the garment shell being configured to generally hang loose about the wearer's legs at the at least one outer leg opening of the absorbent garment.

4. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 2 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the legs of the wearer and fully defines the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

5. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 2 wherein the garment shell further has a crotch region extending longitudinally between the front and back waist regions of the garment shell, the crotch region of the garment shell at least in part defining a pair of outer leg openings of the absorbent garment which are separate from the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

6. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 5 wherein the crotch region of the absorbent assembly is free from attachment to the crotch region of the garment shell.

7. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 further comprising at least one waist elastic member operatively joined to at least one of the front waist end of the absorbent assembly, the back waist end of the absorbent assembly, the front waist end of the garment shell and the back waist end of the garment shell to provide an elastic fit of the absorbent garment against the wearer's waist.

8. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, the front and back

waist ends of the absorbent assembly at least in part defining the waist opening of the absorbent garment.

9. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the waist of the wearer generally at the front and back waist ends of the absorbent assembly to fully define the waist opening of the
5 absorbent garment.

10. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 9 wherein the absorbent assembly is a brief-style absorbent assembly.

11. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the garment shell has a configuration selected from the group comprising shorts, skorts, skirts and swim trunks.

12. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, at least one outer leg opening, and laterally opposite side seams extending generally from the waist opening to said at least one outer leg opening, the absorbent garment being
5 refastenable along at least a portion of each of said side seams.

13. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 12 wherein the absorbent garment is permanently closed along another portion of each of said side seams.

14. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 12 wherein the absorbent garment has a length from the waist opening to the at least one leg opening, the refastenable portion of each side seam comprising in the range of about 25
5 percent to about 50 percent of said length.

15. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 12 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly

having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side
5 margins, the front panel assembly being in generally overlapping relationship with the back panel assembly at the side margins of said front and back panel assemblies whereby the overlapped side margins generally define the side seams of the absorbent garment, the side margins being releasably attached to each other along at least a portion of a length 10 of said side margins to define the refastenable portion of the side seams of the absorbent garment.

16. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 12 wherein the side seams of the absorbent garment are refastenable along the full length of the side seams from the waist opening of the absorbent garment to the at least one 5 outer leg opening thereof.

17. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 4 wherein the absorbent assembly has laterally opposite outer edges at the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and corresponding laterally opposite outer edges at the back 5 waist region of the absorbent assembly, the front and back waist regions of the absorbent assembly being attached to each other generally at the respective outer edges of the front and back waist regions whereby the front and back waist regions of the absorbent assembly together with the crotch 10 region of the absorbent assembly encircle the wearer's legs and define the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

18. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 17 wherein the front and back waist regions of the absorbent assembly are releasably attached at the respective outer edges of said front and back waist regions.

19. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 4 wherein the absorbent assembly further comprises a pair of laterally opposite front side panels extending outward of the absorbent assembly generally at the front waist region on 5 laterally opposite sides thereof, and a pair of laterally opposite back side panels extending outward of the absorbent assembly generally at the back waist region on laterally opposite sides thereof, each of the front side panels being attached to a corresponding one of the back side panels such 10 that the front and back side panels together with the crotch region of the absorbent assembly together fully define the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

20. An absorbent assembly as set forth in claim 19 wherein each of the front side panels of the absorbent assembly is releasably attached to a corresponding one of the back side panels of the absorbent assembly.

21. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 20 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side 5 margins, the front panel assembly being releasably attached to the back panel assembly generally at the respective side margins thereof.

22. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has laterally opposite front side margins and corresponding laterally opposite back side margins, the front side margins and the back side margins 5 being in overlapping relationship with each other to define laterally opposite side seams of the absorbent garment, the amount of overlap of the front side margins with the back side margins being in the range of about 0.1 inches (2.5 mm) to about 6 inches (152.4 mm).

23. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22 wherein the amount of overlap of the front side margins with the back side margins is in the range of about 0.5 inches (12.7 mm) to about 3 inches (76.2 mm).

24. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly comprises a liquid permeable liner defining the inner surface of the absorbent assembly adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer, an outer cover in generally opposed relationship with the liner and defining the outer surface of the absorbent assembly, and an absorbent body disposed between the liner and the outer cover.

25. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 24 wherein the outer cover of the absorbent assembly is liquid impermeable and the garment shell is liquid permeable.